

Valley air district scores well in audit

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Wednesday, Aug. 26, 2009

A recent audit of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District gave the agency high marks for staffing efficiency and productivity, saying it scored better than other large air districts in the state.

The audit was funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and was conducted by a private consulting firm, the Sierra Nevada Air Quality Group.

The study gave the Valley air district high marks for tackling regular duties and special projects with fewer staff and at a lower cost than other districts in the state, including the South Coast, Bay Area, Sacramento and Ventura districts.

The 23,000-square mile Valley district — the largest in the state — covers all or a portion of eight counties, including San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and Kern.

For more about the audit, visit www.valleyair.org.

Tenn. Nissan plant to use methanol to cut costs

By Bill Poovey- Associated Press Writer

In the Merced Sun-Star, Wednesday, Aug. 26, 2009

SMYRNA, Tenn. -- In another cost-cutting move that also makes its car and truck production a little greener, Nissan North America said Tuesday it will use methanol fuel cells on some vehicles used to haul parts to assembly lines, starting at its plant in central Tennessee.

Executives at the plant near Nashville and the CEO of methanol fuel cell provider, Oorja (Or-jah) Protonics of Fremont, Calif., said Nissan was the first automaker to make a commercial switch to the power cells that convert chemical energy in methanol into electrical energy without any combustion.

Nissan is cutting its electric bill and carbon dioxide emissions by making the switch to methanol fuel cells mounted on "tugs," which pull trains of dollies loaded with parts.

Nissan material handling manager Mark Sorgi (Sor-jee) said the new OorjaPac system will power 60 of the 4,400-pound "tugs," eliminating more than 70 electric battery chargers that use almost 540,000 kilowatt-hours of electricity annually. The net savings: \$225,000 a year.

The switch by Oct. 1 to an alternative fuel derived from sources such as wood, grass, landfills, natural gas and coal also ends the process of switching out the 2,000-pound batteries for recharging and frees up about a half-dozen employees for other jobs.

"We are going to see how well the program works here before expanding to the other plants," Sorgi said.

Sorgi said Nissan is leasing the equipment. He declined to discuss the financial details.

The switch also eliminates more than 300 tons of carbon dioxide emissions.

He said the methanol fuel cells save "almost 35 hours a day that were spent by employees, changing out batteries. There is no changing out of low or dead batteries, which involves a battery technician and 15 to 20 minutes. Now the tug driver can refill the fuel cell in less than one minute and they're on their way."

Oorja CEO and founder Sanjiv Malhotra said in a telephone interview that his company was also providing the methanol.

He said the fuel cells will eventually power fork lifts and other heavy equipment. "That is right around the corner," he said.

Nissan said the 5.4 million square foot Smyrna plant with some 4,000 employees has increased its energy efficiency by up to 32 percent since 2005. Changes include turning off and combining equipment such as paint booths at its plants in Smyrna, Decherd and Canton, Miss. is saving \$11.5 million annually, Nissan spokesman Steve Parrett said.

[L.A. Daily News commentary, Wednesday, August 26, 2009:](#)

LA to Vegas high-speed rail is good for travel -- and the economy

By Michael D. Antonovich Michael D. Antonovich represents northern Los Angeles County on the L.A. County Board of Supervisors.

I have consistently advocated and supported strong coalitions among private and public stakeholders to address our region's pressing transportation challenges. One such partnership has resulted in the first segment of the DesertXpress high speed rail project that will connect Southern California to Las Vegas - and will feature a rapid extension from Victorville to Palmdale, which will also link with Metrolink and the Palmdale airport. The DesertXpress will also connect with the California High Speed Rail Network that will run between Northern and Southern California.

By combining the technical know-how and creativity of the private sector with the responsible stewardship and policy support of the public sector, we are creating a sustainable, long-term alternative to the severe traffic congestion and environmental challenges facing the region.

Operating on all new, high-quality, fully grade-separated tracks largely within the I-15 right of way between Las Vegas and Victorville, DesertXpress will be the nation's first dedicated, interstate passenger-only electric high-speed rail system. The Palmdale extension will travel primarily within or adjacent to the right of way of the planned High Desert Corridor to Palmdale.

The DesertXpress breaks ground next year, followed by four years of construction and testing. The rail line will have trains departing from both ends every 20 minutes during peak periods and will operate at speeds of more than 150 mph.

The High Desert Corridor Joint Powers Authority is working in cooperation with colleagues from San Bernardino County, the cities of Victorville and Palmdale, collaborating with the California High Speed Rail Authority. Las Vegas, the congressional delegations of both states and DesertXpress are committed to finalizing the route and completing the environmental clearances required in time to start building the 49-mile Palmdale extension prior to the 2013 opening of the initial leg between Las Vegas and Victorville.

Ready to break ground early next year with private financing, DesertXpress will create thousands of jobs while improving mobility, air quality and convenience. DesertXpress will be the poster child for what can be done when business leaders, elected officials, and community and environmental planners join forces to solve regional problems through public-private partnerships.

[Tracy Press, Commentary, Wednesday, Aug. 26, 2009](#)

Living Green: 'Complete streets' make for better living

by Christina D.B. Frankel

If you remember the fable about the race between the tortoise and the hare, the hare is the early favorite and appears to be the obvious winner. Although the hare is faster, the small turtle wins the day through its perseverance.

Have you ever been stuck in traffic (like 11th Street on Friday afternoon?), and someone on a bike (the tortoise) is beating you (the hare) in your slow crawl toward home?

This race happens every day for us in our daily commute, hurrying to and from work or dropping off our kids at school or sports. It's a race on the road, a race between cars, bikes and pedestrians.

We have all been taught since we were very little that the car rules the road. Our roads are ever widening to accommodate more cars. But what if, in another race, there is someone late for work

in a car, and your child on his way to school on a bike, and your elderly mother walking across the street?

Now, it's not about who wins, but who is safe. What if there was another choice, where everyone on the road could coexist safely? It's a planning strategy called "complete streets."

Complete streets is one of those simple ideas that make all the sense in the world when explained: Everyone on the road — cars, bikes and pedestrians — gets equal importance. None are excluded, and everyone gets to move at his or her own pace, safely next to each other.

With complete streets, walkways are built offset from the street, with planting to buffer noise and filter air pollution. Bike lanes are ample, well-marked and interconnected to one another in comprehensive bike routes. The flow of pedestrian traffic is taken into consideration crossing major thoroughfares, giving pedestrians safe haven in wide medians to await the next light.

The need for complete streets has become more urgent. Unfortunately, in our adulthood, in our rush to get from point A to point B via cars, our society has lost its health: 67 percent of us are overweight, 30 percent of the adult population is obese, and a staggering 16 percent of our children are starting their lives obese.

It sounds simple, but all we need to do is get back to the basics, get out of our cars, and walk and ride our bikes more. But can we do it safely? There are some good and bad examples of complete streets in Tracy:

A+: Sycamore Parkway

This is a major, well-traveled street, yet it has a bike path, and a separate walkway buffered from the street by planting — it's almost an urban forest. The large planted median naturally slows cars down to keep them within the speed limit. It's the best example of the complete streets we should be striving for.

B: Redbridge

This planned subdivision is a good example of how narrow suburban streets slow cars (where traffic should be slower anyway) and still gives ample space to bike lanes and pedestrians. It only loses points for not being interconnected outside its neighborhood.

D: The crossing at 11th Street and Corral Hollow Road

Imagine your elderly mother trying to cross this intersection and you will get shivers down your spine, because she won't make it in one light. There are no protected medians for this extra-wide intersection to allow pedestrians (young and old) to cross and wait safely for the next light. F: West Valley Mall Have you ever tried to walk from Best Buy to the mall? I wouldn't encourage it. There are no walkways to cross the loop road without walking in the parking lot, and bicyclists (if you are brave) share a narrow curved road with speeding traffic.

- For a change: Walk for health: All you need is 30 minutes a day.
- To make a difference: Walk or bike instead of taking the car to the store, coffee shop or downtown.
- To make a stand: Influence those that improve Tracy to make our streets complete Streets. Visit www.completestreets.org for more information.
- Christina D.B. Frankel is a 20-year Tracy resident, architect and mother of three. Her column, Living Green, runs twice-monthly in the Tracy Press.